Genre

facets of a decade
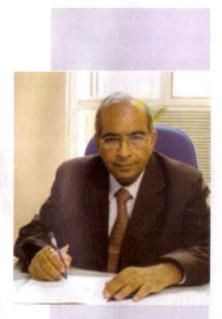
Emerging Trends in Transition from Mainstream Journalism to Citizen Journalism

Introduction

In the long journey over centuries, the transition of journalism from *mainstream journalism* to *citizen journalism* has given to rise to a number of offshoots or new forms of journalism which we aptly describe as *new media* and *alternative media.*

Where as the *multimedia* are the *new media*, the *web journalism or online journalism* is an *alternative media*. In addition to these newer forms, one more branch that is gaining more impetus in the West is *Citizen Journalism or Civil media*. During the course of transition some off shoots like the *Development Journalism* have come up too. As such the scope of the word *'journalism'* is ever widening but whether the principles of journalism apply to the later offshoots as much as they applied to the *main stream journalism* is a billion dollar question.   Since the term *'media'* as is understood now is basically Western in nature, character and content, a lot of debate is centered round the new forms of journalism as to their ability to deliver the public good. This apart a thorough discussion is also on whether these forms of journalism satisfy the basic principles of different theories of communication and communication models. Essentially, two prominent theories of communication—linear and participatory approaches figure

the cut throat competitive world at the advent of cutting edge technologies, the journalism has become a target of acute criticism that it has let the ground off its feet in embracing the subjects like crime, sex, paparazzi, sports, etc more than the public good. Sensationalism and spin-doctoring marked the characteristic features of the present day *market driven journalism*. In the process, some critics of *main stream journalism* argued in favor of *development journalism* free from commercial trappings, where as some others argued in favor of *on-line journalism or web journalism*. But, in between another generation argued that *citizen journalism/ civil media* (mainly FM Radio/TV) holds more promise in terms of delivery for the public good for the reporting through *web blogging* would be more faithful and come truly from among the public. In other words, the criticism in support of *citizen journalism* is that the reporters/sub-editors who are currently reporting in the *main stream journalism* are unable to do justice to some of their stories which are manipulated by the editors to suit their corporate mandate. Such journalists feel that their entire effort to expose the truth turned into a casualty. Hence, the *web blogging or citizen journalism* is the only alternative to protect the truth.

In the early days journalism began as folk arts. In those days it was strictly considered as a one way communication. There was no *gate keeping* in the messages passed on to the public. The messages were of different types: general administrative and public service oriented, threats and warnings, important public affairs such as fairs, melas etc. Subsequently the communication developed in to pamphlets, small posters, hand written news letters, weeklies and journals etc. But most of them operated as individual messages of communication falling short of the definition of a full fledged journalism –i.e. One to many only. *eg. King to people, a leader to people, a writer to people* etc. There is no an institutionalized journalism with all the social inputs being put in one place like today's media with the information from politics,

law, crime, entertainment, business, etc.

It means collective collection of news and collective dissemination of news with *gate keeping* and other functions such as *agenda setting* and *adversarial role* were non existent in those days. However, in the later years journalism realized the importance of feed back and thus a space for the readers' participation in the form of *vox populi* was created in the media. The initial space for the readers' participation was *'letters to the editor'*. Thus one may call *'letters to the editor'* as the earliest form of feedback or people participation in journalism. This practice continued unhindered for over decades. Later years, this participatory approach of the journalism evolved in to a number of themes. For instance the print media used to invite the readers' reaction to a set of problems such as *bad condition of roads, lack of lights in the streets, growing menace of drunkards, lack of environmental cleanliness, etc.* In the last one decade the public participation on the select news items is also becoming a trend. People are requested to contribute their views in two ways: one directly to the media and the other is to send the views to the concerned reporter. The public participation has been further extended to even edit page articles and Sunday magazine articles also in the same way.

However, the electronic media in India for over 5 decades was insulated from the participation till the liberalization in 1990s. Both the government controlled radio and television did not give any space for the people to air their views either on their problems or on select news items. In other words the news broadcast or telecast by these instruments cannot be checked with the local populace where the incident took place for their veracity or for the divergent views on the incident. Thus one sided stories/versions used to be broadcast on the radio and television, which is against the concept of standard journalism. Firstly there is a lot of *gate keeping* than required. Secondly the state controlled media lacked in the essential concept of feed back. Thus for a long time radio and TV journalism

in India used to be mostly despotic and dictatorial.

However, the scenario began to change fast with the rapid expansion of satellite telecommunications, entry of multinational channels, and foreign direct investment in the print media in the post 1990s. One of the greatest contributions came from the *internet and web sources* through *convergence*. The alternate media gave ample freedom to the people to express themselves enhancing the participatory power of electronic media. At this time, the market interests of the corporate groups begin to dominate the editorial priorities and preferences, which meddled with the quality of reporting the truth and delivering information required for the public good. In an effort to circumvent these hurdles and to protect the public cause, came the *citizen journalism/civil media*, both of which operate in an environment free from the corporate manipulations, critics argued

Three forms of Citizen Journalism

Against the backdrop of the introduction, one can categorize the citizen journalism in to three categories: *Print Media Citizen Journalism, Electronic Media Citizen Journalism* and *Internet based Citizen Journalism*. Given three categories, the *print media citizen journalism* and *electronic media citizen journalism* can be still considered falling within the standard definition of journalism as these two could be subject to *multiple gate keeping*. But, it is internet based *citizen journalism* which raises many questions about it being regarded as a full fledged journalism for there is no *gate keeping* at all. This makes it a simple linear Laswellian communication model for which there is no feed back system. One might argue that *web blogs* could be responded by multiple readerships and hence it could be considered a feed back. At the same time, these unedited responses could not be fully regarded as feed back; nor could they be taken up for summative evaluation of a given idea due to their very frequent low quality express and content.

Different Categories of Web blogging

A lot of research is being undertaken to analyze the *web blogs* and kind of public service they offer. *Web blogs* could be launched by any individual on a general basis or on particular topic basis. For instance one can launch a web blog on "Wicked way of Corruption in India'" and might post his/her views in anticipation of public response to it. The low cost web launching systems in India had enabled the people to launch web blogs by many middle and lower income groups.

A variety of web blogs could be launched on different topics: Political, social, economic, caste, community, sex, national integration, cosmetics, etc.

Some socializing websites like Google orkut etc is also giving space for web blogging and expression of views.Web blogs could also be launched for promoting the objectives of the non-governmental organizations.

Even journalists could also launch their own self web blogs. Celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan, Amir Khan, Shahrukh Khan, etc launched their own web blogs in which they discussed about the important business facets of the film industry—such as piracy, north and south, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh etc.

Most of the professional journalists of mainstream press look at the web-blogging as spaces for personal comments or spaces for expression of personal views. One need not pay too much attention to these views given the fact on any one issue, there would be a million divergent views. The purpose of journalism, they argue is to achieve a consensus and uniformity on certain major issues among the different sections of the society. But this is not possible for any individual to achieve though one's *web blogging*. Another argument is that a web blog is the manifestation of more divergent and unacceptable views floated by some self styled mavericks. In short, *web blogging*, though undoubtedly gives a greater expression to one's 'freedom of expression' than the traditional print media or modern electronic media, it falls short of the ability to

integrate and unify. Sometimes, the *web blogs* could be lackadaisical and even more reckless towards social responsibility and may promoted fissiparous or divisive tendencies. Eg. Al-quaida web sites/web blogs.

In the ultimate analysis, it is not easy to say simple *web blogging* promotes a healthy and interactive democracy. At the same time when corporate media—print and electronic—indulge in corporate cultures and politics of media, the ordinary reader finds himself/herself expression less. Firstly the collective failure of the media to represent the common problems of populace and developmental news give rise to so much of dissatisfaction among the people who in turn try to use web-blogs as their source of ventilating the grievances. Viewed from this angle, the web-blogging may be a symptom of disease rather than being a remedy. However, web blogging being an only effective alternative to ventilate one's views, it continuity in the present form is desirable to keep the society off the tensions of regular life. The *web bloggers* have the feel that they could first express and rightly use their freedom of speech. Secondly they feel that there is someone who is hearing them and is responding too. This itself is sufficient enough to validate that a healthy democracy must permit citizen journalism as a part of shock absorbing mechanism or as an alternative ventilating mechanism leading to cathartic processes. However, as long as it does not meet the *gate keeping it* falls short of the definition of a standard journalism. It might thus go a long way before being accepted as full fledged journalism. Till then it stays!

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